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The Syriac *De exercitatione*: A lost edifying piece attributed to Plutarch

Alberto Rigolio

Two Syriac manuscripts written during the seventh and ninth centuries respectively contain three texts transmitted under the name of Plutarch. The three Syriac translations were made from Greek, most likely during the fifth or early sixth century.¹ Two of them are already known in Greek and belong to the *Moralia*: the ‘De capienda ex inimicis utilitate’² and the ‘De cohibenda ira’.³ The third piece is entitled ‘On practice’ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ, and it could be the translation of an original Περὶ ἀσκήσεως (‘De exercitatione’), as the editor suggested.⁴ The ‘De exercitatione’, however, could not be identified with any extant Greek text, and its original appears to have been lost.

Contents

The ‘De exercitatione’ is a short piece with moralizing contents, and it is structured as an exhortation to practice and discipline. The author begins by contrasting the advantages of practice with the benefits deriving from a good natural endowment; and he moves on to argue that practice and discipline can benefit not only the body but also the soul, for they can help control the passions. Also, practice can remedy deficiencies in a person’s natural endowment.

¹ S. Brock, ‘Syriac translations of Greek popular philosophy’, in *Von Athen nach Bagdad*, ed. P. Bruns (Bonn 2003) 9–28.

² MS *Sin. Syr.* 16 from the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Sinai (seventh century); *A Tract of Plutarch, On the Advantage to be Derived from One’s Enemies (De capienda ex inimicis utilitate)*, ed. and trans. E. Nestle, *Studia Sinaitica* 4 (London 1894).

³ MS *Sin. Syr.* 16 (n. 2, above) and MS *BL Add.* 17209 from the British Library (ninth century); *Analecta Syriaca* ed. P. de Lagarde (Leipzig 1858) 186–95, only from MS *BL Add.* 17209.

⁴ MS *Sin. Syr.* 16 (n. 2, above), and MS *BL Add.* 17209 (n. 3, above), where the beginning of the text has been lost; de Lagarde, *Analecta Syriaca* (n. 3, above) 177–86 only from MS *BL Add.* 17209, and German translation in J. Gildemeister and F. Bücheler, ‘Pseudo-Plutarchos, *Peri askeseos*’, *RhM* 27 (1872) 520–38. The opening part of the text, which is lost in MS *BL Add.* 17209, has been recovered from *Sin. Syr.* 16 and it is edited and translated into German by W. Rohlfs, ‘Pseudo-Plutarch, *Peri askeseos*’, in *Paul de Lagarde und die syrische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. D. H. Dörries (Göttingen 1968) 176–84. Some notes to Rohlfs’ translation are found in R. Köbert, ‘Bemerkungen zu den syrischen Zitaten aus Homer und Platon im 5. Buch der Rhetorik des Anton von Tagrit und zum syrischen *peri askeseos*, angeblich von Plutarch’, *Orientalia* 40 (1971) 438–47. The *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate*, *De cohibenda ira*, and *De exercitatione* are mentioned under the entry for Plutarch in a tenth-century Arabic catalogue, the *Fihrist* compiled by Ibn an-Nadīm in Baghdad. The entry for Plutarch includes also the *Placita philosophorum* that Ibn an-Nadīm saw in the Arabic translation by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā; and a work entitled *Soul*, perhaps to be identified with the *De anima* (*Kitāb al-Fihrist* ed. G. Flügel [Leipzig 1872] 254.5–8, where the editor’s reading مورياليا ‘*Moralia*’ should be corrected to قورناليا ‘*Cornelius*’, the addressee of the *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate*, as noticed by D. Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation. A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*, *American Oriental Society* 60 [New Haven 1975] 320 n. 2).

The ‘De exercitatione’ closes with a moral exhortation to disregard the pleasures that the passions generate, and it instead invites the audience to practise a life pattern regulated by exercise and discipline.

The ‘De exercitatione’ seems to fit the form of the diatribe, in that it takes the shape of a general talk to a lay audience on a moral topic, enlivened by abundant illustrations from everyday life.⁵ The text (i) includes several series of rhetorical questions, (ii) makes reference to its oral performance, and (iii) addresses an audience of young Romans;⁶ the author illustrates and supports his argument through frequent use of anecdotes. The anecdotes collected in the ‘De exercitatione’ are based on figures of historical significance such as Aspasia, Philip, and Cleopatra, and on philosophers such as Socrates and Plato. The text also includes anecdotes about the painters Protogenes and Nicomachus, and some anecdotes that are not otherwise attested. There are no references, however, to Greek literary authors or anecdotes about mythological figures.

The ascetic undertone is a recurrent aspect of the ‘practice’ promoted in the ‘De exercitatione’. Most anecdotes show that behind great achievements, such as in sport, in war, and in the arts, there is constant effort and lengthy commitment. Some anecdotes are provided about victorious athletes, as well as about the successful careers of Cimon, Demosthenes, and Plato, and about the military victories of the Romans. Constancy, toil, and endurance of hunger, thirst, and lack of sleep are crucial features of the models of behaviour proposed by the author. An ideal of conduct is provided through reference to the philosophers, for they are content with a simple lifestyle, basic food, and modest clothing.⁷

One suspects that the moral contents of the text, and, in particular, the exercise and ascetic practice that the ‘De exercitatione’ proposes played a crucial role in the selection of the piece for translation into Syriac, and it may have contributed to its subsequent manuscript transmission. The ‘De exercitatione’ encourages the practice of regular exercise of both the body and the mind, and it invites one to impose toils and discipline on oneself. The Syriac translation was addressed to a Christian audience, and the text does not contain any reference to pagan mythology or religion.

Translation process

Before presenting the text, it is necessary to enquire what sort of textual transformation the transmission into Syriac may have involved. How did the translators operate? How faithful to the original should one expect the translation to be? In what respects, on the other hand, should one expect the Syriac text to differ from the original? Unlike earlier scholarship on the ‘De

⁵ Valuable remarks can be found in A. D. Nock, ‘Diatribe form in the *Hermetica*’, *JEA* 11 (1925) 126–37, reprinted in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart (Oxford 1972) 26–32.

⁶ (i) 178.25–179.5, 180.15, 181.5, 181.25, 184.1–185.15; (ii) 178.15, 186.10; (iii) 184.20, 185.15, but see also the note at 184.20.

⁷ 182.15–183.1.

exercitatione’,⁸ we now have a better understanding of the translation techniques involved in rendering Greek texts into Syriac. Also, a comparison with the Syriac translations of Plutarchan texts that have surviving originals (the ‘De capienda ex inimicis utilitate’ and the ‘De cohibenda ira’) and of other pieces of Greek secular literature (Lucian’s *De calumnia* and Themistius’ *De amicitia*) proves particularly useful in gaining a picture of the translation process that the ‘De exercitatione’ underwent.⁹

Sebastian Brock has shown that the translation technique into Syriac developed over the centuries towards a greater degree of faithfulness to the Greek originals. The Syriac translations of Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius are likely to have been produced during the fifth or early sixth century, and they do not attest the developments towards greater faithfulness that late sixth- and seventh-century translations regularly show.¹⁰ As far as the translations of Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius are concerned, the comparison with the Greek originals shows that the translation unit can be as large as the sentence. Within this group of translations, Lucian’s *De calumnia* is the most faithful to the original, while the ‘De cohibenda ira’ is the least faithful, for the translation unit can occasionally be as large as the paragraph. Accordingly, one may expect the ‘De exercitatione’ to be a relatively free translation, with a translation unit as large as the sentence, and perhaps occasionally larger.

The comparison of the Syriac translations of Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius with their originals reveals another important feature. The translations present some textual changes that appear to have been carried out deliberately and consistently. These textual changes are the result of a consistent process of editing that characterizes the translations of Plutarch’s ‘De capienda ex inimicis utilitate’ and ‘De cohibenda ira’, of Lucian’s *De calumnia*, and of Themistius’ *De amicitia*, and reveals that the translations were composed in view of similar uses. There is the possibility, then, that the ‘De exercitatione’ had also undergone a similar process of textual change.

The changes applied to the texts of Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius match certain identifiable criteria, of which I shall outline the four most conspicuous ones.¹¹ A first concern that the translations reveal arises from the references to pagan religion that are found in the texts. The Greek texts contain references to a plurality of ‘gods’, to ‘Zeus’, and to the ‘Muses’, and these were systematically omitted or, if possible, rendered with the word ‘God’. Although there is no positive evidence for the phenomenon, the absence of references to pagan religion in the ‘De exercitatione’ is compatible with the hypothesis of Christianizing intervention in the text.

⁸ Gildemeister and Bücheler, ‘Pseudo-Plutarchos’ (n. 4, above); Rohlf, ‘Pseudo-Plutarch’ (n. 4, above).

⁹ A. Rigolio, ‘From *sacrifice to the gods* to the *fear of God*: Omissions, additions, and changes in the Syriac translations of Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius’, *Studia Patristica* 64 (2013) 133–43; M. Conterno, ‘Retorica Pagana e Cristianesimo Orientale: la traduzione Siriaca dell’Orazione *Peri philias* di Temistio’, *Annali di Scienze Religiose* n.s. 3 (2010) 161–88; M. Conterno, *Temistio Orientale. Orazioni Temistiane nella Tradizione Siriaca e Araba* (Brescia 2014).

¹⁰ S. Brock, ‘Towards a history of Syriac translation technique’, in *III Symposium Syriacum*, ed. R. Lavenant, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 221 (Rome 1980) 1–14.

¹¹ Rigolio, ‘From *sacrifice*’ (n. 9, above).

A third feature of the texts is the rendering of some of the proper names. On some occasions, the proper names of the characters in the anecdotes are replaced by anonymous titles. So, for instance, 'Xerxes' became, in Syriac, 'a Persian king', 'Pindar' became 'a wise man', and the Pontifex Maximus Spurius Minucius became 'the judge'. It appears that the process aimed to make the anecdotes more generic, possibly simpler, and thus more easily reproducible.¹² The Syriac 'De exercitatione' appears to have undergone similar changes, as some of the characters in the anecdotes are generic 'old men', 'lyre players', 'philosophers', or 'athletes'.

Καὶ πρῶτον μὲν, ἣ φησιν Ἰπποκράτης
χαλεπωτάτην εἶναι νόσον ἐν ἣ τοῦ
νοσοῦντος ἀνομοιότατον αὐτῷ γίνεται
τὸ πρόσωπον, οὕτως ὄρων ὑπ' ὀργῆς
ἐξισταμένους μάλιστα καὶ
μεταβάλλοντας ὄψιν, χροάν, βάδισμα,
φωνήν [...]

[illegible]

4

colour of their faces is changed, but also their voice, [189.5] their movements and their sight, *and their outside is the image of what is inside*.¹³

යුද්ධයේදී ජනතාවගේ ජීවිතයට හානි සිදුවීමට හේතු වන බැවින්
 ජනතාවගේ ජීවිතයට හානි සිදුවීමට හේතු වන බැවින්
 ජනතාවගේ ජීවිතයට හානි සිදුවීමට හේතු වන බැවින්
 [3.10] ජනතාවගේ ජීවිතයට හානි සිදුවීමට හේතු වන බැවින්

It is possible to see that many things, although adverse and harmful to *us*, *in other respects benefit us*. How many have fallen sick in the body, and this [3.10] sickness of theirs *restrained (and) hindered them from evil*.¹⁴

Authorship

¹³ Plut. 'De cohibenda ira' 455e : Syr. 189.1–5.

¹⁴ Plut. 'De capienda ex inimicis utilitate' 87a : Syr. 3.6–10.

¹⁵ Plut. 'An virtus doceri possit' 439f and 440b respectively; 'De exercitatione' R70 and 183.15.

¹⁶ Plut., 'De fortuna Romanorum' 317c-d.

and in the body, is a theme treated in the ‘De garrulitate’ and in the ‘De curiositate’.¹⁷ At least three of the anecdotes reported in the ‘De exercitatione’ are also found in Plutarch’s *Lives*.¹⁸

To accept, with the manuscripts, that the author of the ‘De exercitatione’ was Plutarch, however, presents some problems, as past scholarship has shown. Paul de Lagarde first published the Syriac text in 1858 from the British Library manuscript alone: this manuscript is incomplete and his edition therefore lacks the opening (c. seventy-five lines). Nonetheless, de Lagarde could recover the Syriac title from the subscription at the end of the text, which read: ‘end of the discourse on practice by the philosopher Plutarch’, and hence identified the text as the ‘De exercitatione’. In 1872, Gildemeister translated de Lagarde’s text into German and Bücheler wrote an introduction. The Syriac word for practice, ܠܥܝܢܐ, seemed to stand as a translation of ἄσκησις, thus suggesting the title of Περὶ ἀσκήσεως. The only work with a roughly similar title in the existing catalogues of Plutarchan works, however, is the lost Περὶ γυμνασμάτων ‘On exercises’; given that nothing else is known about this lost text, the possibility that the two pieces should be identified cannot be excluded at this stage.¹⁹

Another possibility, however, is that the Syriac translator modified the original title of the work, not least because the other Plutarchan translations show some variance in their titles. The title of the ‘De capienda ex inimicis utilitate’ (Πῶς ἂν τις ὑπ’ ἐχθρῶν ὠφελοῖτο) is faithfully translated into Syriac, but the title of the ‘De cohibenda ira’ (Περὶ ἀοργησίας) ‘On controlling anger’, was simply rendered with ܠܥܝܢܐ ܠܥܝܢܐ ‘On anger’. On these grounds, Bücheler noticed the similarity to the short summary of another lost piece transmitted under the name of Plutarch. The work was entitled Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων, and its abstract was provided by Sopater of Apamea in the lost Ἐκλογαὶ διάφοροι, which, in turn, were briefly summarized by Photius.

Photius’ summary of the Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων, then, did not rely on direct knowledge of the text and, in addition, it is not particularly sophisticated in that it seems to refer to specific anecdotes rather than outlining the overall argument of the piece:

περί τε φύσεως καὶ πόνων, ὅπως τε πολλοὶ πολλάκις πόνῳ τὴν φύσιν οὐκ εὖ φερομένην ὥρθωσαν, ἕτεροι δὲ καλῶς ἔχουσιν ἐξ ἀμελείας διέφθειραν, ὅπως τε ἔνιοι ἐν μὲν νέοις βραδεῖς ἐνεωρῶντο πᾶσι καὶ ἀσύνητοι, ἀκμασάντων δὲ εἰς τὸ ταχὺ καὶ συνετὸν αὐτοῖς ἡ φύσις ἐξέλαμψεν.

On natural endowment and hard work (Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων), how many men have often by hard work corrected an inadequate natural endowment, while others have spoiled a good one by neglect; also how some men in their youth have given everyone the impression of being slow and unintelligent, but when they reached their prime, a sudden development of personality made them quick and intelligent.²⁰

¹⁷ D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London 1973) 88–89.

¹⁸ 178.25–179.15 (Plut. *Dem.* 8); 181.20–182.10 (Plut. *Art.* 26 and *Per.* 24); 183.1–5 (Plut. *Cim.* 4).

¹⁹ The entry is no. 173 in the *Lamprias Catalogue*; F. H. Sandbach, *Moralia* (London and Cambridge, MA 1976) 24–25. The noun ܠܥܝܢܐ is elsewhere a translation of γυμνασία, see R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford 1879), s.v.

²⁰ Phot. *Bibl.* 161 on Sopater of Apamea, Ἐκλογαὶ διάφοροι (Sandbach fr. 172); *Moralia*, trans. Sandbach (n. 19,

As Bücheler noticed, Photius' summary seems to provide more information than is actually contained in the 'De exercitatione'. In the text that he could read, (i) the theme of an inadequate natural endowment is treated marginally. In addition, (ii) Bücheler could find only one passage and one anecdote about individuals who have spoilt their good natural endowment by neglect (177.25–178.5). Also, (iii) there is only one anecdote that fits Photius' description of a sudden development of personality (Cimon 183.1–10). Accordingly, Bücheler concluded that the *De exercitatione* could not be identified with the *Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων*.

The discovery of the opening part of the 'De exercitatione' in a Sinai manuscript (published in 1968), however, has radically changed our understanding of the structure of the piece. The previously unknown section deals, in fact, with nature (φύσις), lit. *ܒܢܝܥܢܐ ܕܬܝܒܐ* 'predisposition of nature' (R6), and throws new light on Bücheler's arguments. First, the text sets out to consider whether natural predisposition or assiduous toil is more advantageous (R5–10). After reporting two anecdotes that illustrate the power of practice and the power of a good natural endowment respectively (R10–50), (i) the author argues for the capacity of practice in overcoming the deficiencies of a poor natural endowment (R50–60); and (ii) the lost section of text also discusses the deterioration of a good natural endowment through neglect, which it illustrates with a few examples (R60–75).

The third argument by Bücheler, however, remains unchallenged, for the anecdote about Cimon is still the only one that fits the description of a sudden development of personality by somebody who had given a different impression in youth. As has been shown, however, the selection and omission of anecdotes is a feature of the transmission of Plutarch into Syriac, and there is the possibility that the original text included more than one anecdote on the theme. In particular, the sentence preceding the anecdote about Cimon states that '*many* [*ܡܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ*], through diligence, came to an advantageous transformation' (183.1), and it is conceivable that the original text contained more than one anecdote. Given the practice of omitting anecdotes, the absence of anecdotes in itself may not constitute a compelling case to reject the identification with the *Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων*.

Photius' summary seems to suit the contents of the 'De exercitatione', although, given the omissions that occurred in the transmission and the extremely condensed nature of the summary, the identification of the 'De exercitatione' with the *Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων* remains confined to speculation. In addition, the discovery of the text in the Sinaitic manuscript has revealed the original heading of the translation. The heading reads '*second* discourse on practice by the same Plutarch'. There is the possibility, then, that what survives today is only the second part of an original work, the first part of which is lost. Alternatively, the indication in the title may pertain to the fact that the 'De exercitatione' is the second piece by Plutarch in the sequence of texts in *Sin. Syr.* 16.

Was Plutarch the author of the 'De exercitatione', as the two manuscripts indicate? As Bücheler showed, there are elements that cast doubts on Plutarchan authorship. A first obstacle is

constituted by some close similarities with passages from the ‘De liberis educandis’ (R60–65; 180.1–10; 180.20–25; 185.10–15). The Syriac translation, however, may not provide enough evidence to decide if the author of the ‘De exercitatione’ drew from the ‘De liberis educandis’, or if both authors ultimately relied on an earlier source, perhaps Plutarch’s *Hypomnemata*.²¹

There is, however, a more conspicuous issue that undermines a Plutarchan authorship. A passage in the ‘De exercitatione’ contains a major historical inaccuracy that is unlikely to have been caused by the process of translation (181.20–182.20). The confusion would have required a degree of intervention in the text that is not normally found among the Syriac translations of Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius. The inaccuracy is most likely to have affected the Greek text from which the translation was carried out. The problem lies in the account of the life of Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles, where the text brings together and identifies two different figures who are known as Aspasia: the mistress of Pericles on the one hand and one of the concubines of Cyrus the Younger on the other. The identification of Pericles’ mistress and Cyrus’ concubine from Phocaea is erroneous and not historically viable. In addition, the sequence of the two anecdotes about the two Aspasias in the ‘De exercitatione’ is chronologically inverted.

Both anecdotes are found in the *Life of Pericles*, where Plutarch was careful to keep the two figures apart, while the anecdote on Aspasia the Phocaeian is also found in the *Life of Artaxerxes*.²² In the *Life of Pericles*, Plutarch reported that it was the fame of Pericles’ Aspasia that led Cyrus the Younger to name his favourite concubine after her. If this was also the original text of the *De exercitatione*, one cannot find a satisfactory explanation for why the Syriac adaptor would have changed the text in such a radical way. The change would have meant the undue identification of the two Aspasias, and the inversion of the sequence of the anecdotes. Neither change appears to have any logical justification. Also, the addition of anecdotes in Syriac is not attested in the Syriac translations of Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius.

There is the possibility, however, that the Greek text that the Syriac translator used was not exactly the same text composed by its author, whether Plutarch or not.²³ One may conjecture that the problematic anecdote about Cyrus’ Aspasia represents an expansion of the Greek text underlying the Syriac translation (181.25–182.5). In fact, the anecdote does not appear to be immediately related to the broader theme of the passage and could be easily isolated without disrupting the argumentation.²⁴ It might be the case that the Syriac translation reports an interpolation that was not part of the Greek original. Another occasion in which an early Syriac

²¹ M. Beck, ‘Plutarch’s *Hypomnemata*’, in *Condensing Texts — Condensed Texts*, eds M. Horster and C. Reitz (Stuttgart 2010) 349–67.

²² Plut. *Per.* 24 and *Art.* 26.

²³ In addition, since literature on Aspasia was extensive (including comedies and a dialogue), the very identification of the two figures may not even have been an innovation by the author of the ‘De exercitatione’. See P. Stadter, *A Commentary on Plutarch’s Pericles* (Chapel Hill 1989) *ad loc.*, and Xen. *An.* 1.10.2–3.

²⁴ 181.25–182.1: ‘When Cyrus’ to ‘went to Athens’. The problematic anecdote does not appear to be immediately related to the topic of the ‘De exercitatione’ and the main argument of the passage would not be altered without it. Unlike the anecdote about Cyrus’ Aspasia, the anecdote about Pericles’ Aspasia who trained a sheep dealer in rhetoric can be put in relation to the argument of the ‘De exercitatione’ as well as to the summary of the Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων. Relying on Aeschines of Sphettus’ dialogue entitled *Aspasia*, Plutarch reported that the sheep dealer was of low birth and of poor natural endowment (*Per.* 24.4: ἐξ ἀγεννοῦς καὶ ταπεινοῦ τὴν φύσιν).

translation reports an expanded Greek text is represented by Basil of Caesarea's *Homily on Deut. xv 9*, which contains a note about the Olympic Games that was not part of the original Greek text.²⁵

It is possible to conceive that Plutarch may have used muddled material about Aspasia (perhaps before the composition of the *Life of Pericles*), or that the addition of the problematic anecdote could have happened at a later stage, but the odd mixture of historical statements with bizarre misstatements, as in the case of Demosthenes (178.25–179.15), reveals the poor quality of the piece and constitutes an obstacle to accepting the manuscripts' attribution of the 'De exercitatione' to Plutarch. Besides the issue of authorship, however, the discovery of a new manuscript containing the opening part of the text (*Sin. Syr.* 16), a better understanding of the development of the Syriac translation technique between the fourth and sixth centuries, and a comparative analysis with the Syriac translations of other secular pieces by Plutarch, Lucian, and Themistius lead us to consider the possible identification of the 'De exercitatione' with the Περὶ φύσεως καὶ πόνων mentioned by Sopater of Apamea. Although the condensed nature of the summary does not allow a definitive conclusion, the identification of the two pieces may not be as far-fetched as Bücheler had concluded on the basis of the incomplete text that he could read.

Translation

The translation of the 'De exercitatione' follows. The Greek words in brackets indicate Syriac loanwords from Greek. Words in round brackets are my additions to the text. The translation is based on MS *Sin. Syr.* 16 (*Sin*) for the first part of the piece, following the edition by Rohlfs (the numbering is preceded by R). The remaining part of the text is preserved in both *Sin* and BL *Add.* 17209 (*BL*). Since the manuscripts do not present major textual variation, the translation normally follows the text of *BL* edited by de Lagarde, unless otherwise indicated. A list of variant readings between the two manuscripts is reported after the translation, together with an index of proper names mentioned in the text.²⁶

²⁵ S. Brock, 'Basil's *Homily on Deut. xv 9*: Some remarks on the Syriac manuscript tradition', in *Texte und Textkritik: einer Aufsatzsammlung*, ed. J. Dummer, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der althristlichen Literatur 133 (Berlin 1987) 57–66, 64.

²⁶ The list of the variant readings between the manuscripts does not include minor orthographic ones such as those affecting the Syriac transcriptions of Greek proper names.

De exercitatione (ܠܥܝܬܐܢܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ)

[R1] Second discourse by the same Plutarch on practice.²⁷

It is right to praise the man who, endowed with a clear understanding as well as a good talent, increases and extends these very gifts through diligence. In like manner, every work is accomplished (only) when the attributes of nature are found (in it) and [R5] their excellence is perceptible for they have been perfected through toil. One should then consider if natural predisposition or assiduous toil is more advantageous.²⁸ Therefore, it is right that I deal with both, for many have behaved virtuously and have overcome their companions in a running competition (ἀγών), while others have obtained the victory in a contest of (mere) strength. It is reported that Theogenes grasped a fierce bull by his horn, and he did not release it [R10] until the horn was broken;²⁹ and (Polydamas did the same thing with) another (bull that he held) by its hoof.³⁰

A story says that, when Philadelphus had defeated the Galatians and prepared a festival (to celebrate) that he had cast down their corpses, he sent (messengers) to every Greek land to gather citharodes (κιθάρα)³¹ and skilled wrestlers.³² Once the athletes (ἀθλητής) had gathered because of the fame of the king and because of the magnificence of the nobles, and the competition (ἀγών) opened, however, nobody from the town [R15] dared to wrestle against those (athletes, thus) causing great sorrow to the king. In the same town there was an old man who was not trained in fighting. The king summoned him and said: ‘In the past our city was the mother of illustrious athletes (ἀθλητής), but it is now left bereaved; and there is the danger that foreigners (ξένος) may take the crown! Who [R20] then, old man, do you reckon might meet the men who came?’ He answered: ‘We shall think about this’, and he went home in silence. Here, he wore a robe (στολή) covered in dust and filth, and trained himself by carrying heavy stones and jumping. Later, he summoned some young people from the town, and defeated them in a fight without any toil. [R25] Delighted, he ran to the king and told him: ‘I myself shall fight against these strangers!’ (ξένος) The king was surprised that in his old age he accepted the toil belonging to youth, but he nonetheless fought as he said, and defeated the athletes (ἀθλητής) who had

²⁷ In *Sin. Syr.* 16, the ‘De exercitatione’ follows Plutarch’s ‘De capienda ex inimicis utilitate’.

²⁸ The passage can be compared with [Longin.] *De subl.* 2 on the combination of *physis* and *technē*.

²⁹ Possibly Theogenes/Theagenes of Thasus (Paus. 6.6.5–6).

³⁰ Paus. 6.5.6 has a similar anecdote about Polydamas of Skotoussa, whom Diod. 9.14–15 described as having great strength but little sense. The two athletes are referred to together in Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 35 and *Deor. Conc.* 12, and it seems likely that the original text contained two different anecdotes.

³¹ Here, unlike below in R30–35, the Syriac uses a derivative of κιθάρα for ‘citharode’.

³² Attalus II Philadelphus. It is plausible that the full name was reported in Greek but was then reduced to ‘Philadelphus’ by the Syriac translator, as was common practice in the Syriac translations of Plutarch: Rigolio, ‘From *sacrifice*’ (n. 9, above).

gathered. He who was old (defeated) the young, and he who despised wrestling (defeated) the skilled (in wrestling); and he caused the town, which was near to being stripped of (its) crown, to be proclaimed victorious.³³ In this way, nature was subdued, for [R30] he dealt with the business of youth in old age, and he neglected (matters) of skill.³⁴

In our time, there was a citharode (κιθαρωδός) who had no equals. They relate that he used to breed donkeys until a man skilled in music heard him, promised him success, and persuaded him to attend to the cithara (κιθάρα). (The citharode) perfected (his) art so much that [R35] he surpassed not only the citharodes (κιθαρωδός) of his time, but also, I believe, those who are yet to come. His melody was sweet and light, and his voice was so full of passion and strength that one would believe the bellow of a bull came from his mouth. He delighted the listeners with pleasant melodies, yet he followed a repulsive lifestyle, for he was intoxicated and immersed himself in wine, [R40] lived in fornication, and gave himself to every pleasure. Although he indulged in all these pleasures, however, he could not hinder the gift that was in his nature; and other artists, although they practised and exercised and abstained from (these) pleasures, gave him praise. When one of them went to him and said: ‘Why, although I abstain from every pleasure and (do) nothing that harms me, is [R45] my voice so different?’ He, who was accustomed to making jokes, told him: ‘Do you not see these bronze statues (ἀνδριάντα)? In a thousand years they have done nothing to harm the voice, and yet no voice comes out of their mouths!’

Likewise, when there is no opportunity for nature (to flourish), perhaps one despises toil, much as those who leave their friends when they see they gain nothing from them. For he [R50] whose understanding is not clear, whenever he seeks to control his soul without perceiving that he has not made any progress, immediately gives himself up to negligence, as twisted branches that, even if one forces and straightens them out for a moment, return to their previous bent as soon as they are released.³⁵

We ought, then, to show the advantage that comes from practice. How often have the deficiencies of nature been fulfilled through diligence, [R55] as much as other things!

³³ Lit. ‘he proclaimed the town in victory’. For the proclamation of a victorious athlete’s city, see L. Robert, ‘Sur des inscriptions d’Éphèse: fêtes, athlètes, empereurs, épigrammes’, *RPh* 41 (1967) 7–84, 18–27, reprinted in L. Robert, *Opera minora selecta: Epigraphie et antiquités Grecques* (Amsterdam 1969) V 347–424, and L. Robert, ‘Les Épigrammes Satiriques de Lucillius sur les athlètes. Parodie et réalité,’ *Entretiens sur l’Antiquité Classique* 14 (1969) 179–295, 193–98, reprinted in *Choix d’Écrits*, ed. D. Rousset (Paris 2007) 175–246.

³⁴ This sentence is elliptic, but the sense is that the old man was able to overcome the skills of the other competitors through practice.

³⁵ The passage presents similarities with Ps.-Plut. ‘De liberis educandis’ 2E; but see also Sen. *QNat.* 2.24, Them. *Or.* 21.249A, and M. Kertsch, ‘Ein bildhafter Vergleich bei Seneca, Themistios, Gregor von Nazianz und sein kynisch-stoischer Hintergrund’, *VChr* 30 (1976) 241–57.

It is not admirable that one guides a ship when the sea is not perturbed, but (it is admirable) that one brings it to the harbour (λιμήν) when (the sea) is rough.³⁶ One is not a commander during peace, but when battles press hard. Therefore, it is not admirable that one excels when the attributes of nature are found, but (that) one succeeds through practice when they are wanting.

For everything improves through toil, and [R60] the magnificent is disfigured through negligence. Good soil, when it is deprived of labour, reverts to wilderness and produces a tangle of thorns without fruit. The better a horse is at running, the more difficult it is to ride when it is not subdued by bridles. The vineyard, when it is not pruned, reduces the (production of) bunches of grapes and produces shoots (instead).³⁷

The same also happens to virtuous minds [R65] because of evil, whenever they are neglected. Indeed, passions attack each one of us. One loves money; one thirsts for honour; another³⁸ is subdued by lust; another is thrown down by envy; another fails to subdue anger. But these passions are subdued through toil and discipline in the same way as those men who have learnt obedience through military life and war. For if everybody is carried away in a violent temper, [R70] our life would be similar not only to that of the barbarians, but also to that of animals.

Behold, many who have turned to discipline have improved themselves and benefited their cities!

Similarly, the soul of the young is fresh and malleable in the hands of the teachers; (and) when (the teacher) raises the young like seedlings through toil and discipline, they do not find occasion to act stupidly, but if he turns away and leaves them, they commit every [R75] evil.³⁹

There is nothing [177.9] so difficult that one cannot accomplish (it) through assiduity, and nothing so easy [177.10] that it can be accomplished by carelessness. So also the gifts of the soul and of the body shall not be weakened (if they are maintained) through discipline. For just as much as the gait of him who has healthy sight is better than (the gait of) him whose eyes are infirm, so he who is (made) good through knowledge is far better than he who goes about without understanding.⁴⁰ There are few whose knowledge is great and follow an immoral life-style. [177.15] But we shall not consider this; rather let us consider for what reason, if the advantages coming from knowledge⁴¹ are not to be found in them, they do not leave their poor state but resemble bodies that are too sick to be able to recover.

³⁶ The anecdote is later found in John Chrysostom, *De sacerdotio* 324.24 (ed. Malingrey).

³⁷ The passage presents conspicuous similarities with Ps.-Plut. 'De liberis educandis' 2D.

³⁸ Read ܠܫܬܐ for ܠܫܬܐ .

³⁹ Contrast Plut. 'An virtus doceri possit' 439F.

⁴⁰ The passage appears to have been considerably abbreviated.

⁴¹ The Syriac word is ܡܚܝܬܐ 'wisdom, knowledge, science, philosophy'.

At Queen Cleopatra's (court) there was a philosopher⁴² who was very impudent, loved profit, and would do anything [177.20] for the sake of money. It happened that some people gathered to listen to him, (to whom) he said: 'Men, I see that many of you blame (me) by saying: "what has this person gained from philosophy?" Be convinced that, if I had not restrained my cupidity, even if a little, through philosophy, perhaps I would have been a murderer, a robber, or a breaker of walls!'⁴³

[177.25] We have thus sufficiently shown that discipline and good application are beneficial for the soul. I now intend to show that practice benefits the body too.

Many have trained their left (hand) so that it became as apt to work as their right.⁴⁴ Others have ruined and enfeebled the power of their strength and the force of their limbs through excessive drinking of wine, and their talents have deteriorated because of greediness and fornication. But others, who were not particularly talented, [177.30] have completely fulfilled their needs through diligence.

It is with our own eyes that we have seen [178.1] two athletes (ἀθλητής) in a fight. One of them was short and the other was tall; but the short one was strengthened by practice and endured punches and blows like adamant (ἀδάμας), while the tall one, because of (his) dissoluteness and the pampering of his body, fought as if he had hands (made) of wax. [178.5] All his force (eventually) came to naught because of lack of practice, and (the short) one surpassed him as much as men surpass women.

Women (can) also teach us about diligence, (they) who do not let themselves be seen by men if they are not adorned. But I am very much ashamed when I see men that are adorned, if it is right to call men those who, after they have bathed, run to mirrors [178.10] and oils, and comb their hair to make themselves beautiful; and do not do so in secret or in shame and in darkness, but in front of everybody. They show their laxity — not to say (their) luxury — and they display their slackness when they do not even refrain from (wearing) an ornament such as those made by brides whose bridal chambers have not yet been unveiled; and perhaps they want, instead of men, [178.15] to be women.⁴⁵ But I do not know how I have wandered off (the point) that I speak harshly about these things.

⁴² This is likely to be a certain Philostratus, sophist in Alexandria, about whom see Plut. *Ant.* 80 with C. B. R. Pelling, *Plutarch. Life of Antony* (Cambridge 1988) 310–11, and Philostr. *VS* 1.5.

⁴³ I.e. a thief; compare Luc. *Cal.* 16.

⁴⁴ See M. *Ant.* 12.6.

⁴⁵ See Epict. *Diss.* 3.1.28: δείξω ὑμῖν ἄνδρα, ὃς θέλει μᾶλλον γυνὴ εἶναι ἢ ἀνὴρ; the anecdote about Diogenes in Diog. Laert. 6.46.

It is also beneficial to learn from the painter Protogenes. He was so diligent in his art that it took him ten years to finish (his) famous painting that was in Rhodes. We learn that from remote regions (people) went to see the art of †his pupil†, and [178.20] they were amazed at the beauty of his painting, at the (long) duration of his instruction, and at the greatness of his toil, for he endured and defeated his poverty.⁴⁶

Not only do I praise the diligent, but (I also say) as Socrates said: ‘He who does not toil on earth may not seek fruit from God, and he who is not a skilful horseman may not seek victory from Him.’⁴⁷ Again, Protagoras said: [178.25] ‘Discipline does not spring in the soul until one has reached a considerable depth’, and by depth he meant the knowledge that comes from much practice. Another said: ‘Discipline⁴⁸ in the heart does not sprout like trees in a field, but it springs like philosophy from hearing and from seeing.’

Since I have come to this point, then, I shall call to mind the rhetor (ρήτωρ) Demosthenes.⁴⁹ What moment, or what time, or [178.30] what toil did he spend in vain? What kind of speech did he not master [179.1] with his tongue?⁵⁰ What did he hear (spoken) that he was not able to convert into useful speech?⁵¹ Or what pleasures did he not despise? Those who wrote about him say that, because of (his) love of study, he did not extinguish (his) lamp for fifty years. He left the city and its tumult, and he lived by the side of the harbour (λιμὴν). In the mornings [179.5] he used to visit the workmen, sitting next to those who made needles, and observing how they pierced needles and bent fish-hooks; and by watching their great fatigue, his zeal for philosophy grew. Many report that for his entire life he drank only water. Who showed the benefits of toil more than he?

Others [179.10] say that Demades surpassed him in brightness of understanding.⁵² But even if he was superior to (Demosthenes) in philosophy, he was rightly despised because of the obscenity of his lifestyle. Indeed, he collected a considerable amount of money from the governorship of

⁴⁶ Protogenes made a portrait at Ialysus in seven years in Plut. *Demetr.* 22 and in Ael. *VH* 12.41, in contrast to eleven years in Fronto, *Ep.* 1.241. The latter seems to be the tradition attested to here, since the Syriac might have read *ḏēka* for *ēvdeka*. The word *ܡܠܬܐ* ‘his pupil’ does not make sense in the context and appears as a textual corruption.

⁴⁷ According to Gildemeister (n. 4, above), ‘horseman’ stands for ‘charioteer’.

⁴⁸ Read *ܠܗܪܝܢ* for *ܠܗܪܝܬ*.

⁴⁹ See Plut. *Dem.* 8.

⁵⁰ Gildemeister 1872 (n. 4, above) 526, proposed to read *ܡܬܬ* ‘his net’ for *ܡܬܬ* ‘his tongue’. Lit.: ‘did he not capture within his tongue?’ while *Sin* reads: ‘did he not increase in his tongue?’

⁵¹ The question is extremely elliptic.

⁵² See Plut. *Dem.* 8.

the town and used it (to satisfy) his own desires. When he was asked: ‘Where has all the gold got to?’ he showed his belly and said: ‘Nothing [179.15] is enough for this!’⁵³

But I shall (now) cease, for I have said too much about this (topic).

As Demosthenes showed that many things are easy to overcome through toil, so also Socrates showed that desires are easy to overcome through diligence.

In his time, there came a man named Zopyrus, who professed to be able to understand the passions of the soul from the outward appearance of a person. He [179.20] came to Athens at the time when (the city) was flourishing with renowned individuals, (and,) when the news spread that there had come a man who could examine the character of the soul by observing the face, the chiefs of the city gathered because of the enormity of his claim. (Zopyrus) said: ‘Put in front of me whomsoever you want, and I shall say, by looking at him, what his habits are.’ So they brought in Socrates, whom he did not [179.25] know. After observing him, he said: ‘This man is lustful, and free from restraint in desiring women!’ and everybody laughed at him and at his lack of understanding, for he was calling a chaste man lustful. But Socrates stopped them and said: ‘Truly, this man did not lie! For I am prone to pleasure by nature, but I am [179.30] the way you know me thanks to diligence.’ Most people were carried away and [180.1] inflamed by anger at first, but later they calmed down as they considered that there was no perception (of passions) at all in him.⁵⁴

While (Socrates) was teaching, a young man approached, kicked him, and fled. His pupils wanted to run (after him) and take vengeance, but he did not let them do so. He told them: ‘It [180.5] seems that, even if a donkey kicked me in a street, you would rage and kick it since it kicked me. You do not abstain from anger, although you know that there are many people whose manners are no different from those of a beast of burden and of the rest of the animals!’⁵⁵

(Socrates) did⁵⁶ something superior to this when he received an insult in the theatre (θέατρον) where people had gathered from many places. [180.10] Aristophanes reviled him at length in front of everybody as one who had obtained many honours through shame, (and) whilst being derided by him, (Socrates) remained silent without being irritated at his words. When he met

⁵³ For a comparison see Plut. ‘De cupid. divit.’ 525C; and Athenaeus 44F.

⁵⁴ Zopyrus the physiognomicist provided the subject for the lost dialogue *Zopyrus* by Phaedo of Elis (Diog. Laert. 2.105); for the anecdote see Cic. *Tusc.* 4.37.80 and *Fat.* 10, Alex. *De fato* 6, and G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* (Napoli 1990) I 62–63. The anecdote is found in the Arabic *Muḥtār min Kalām al-Ḥukamā’ al-Arba’ah al-Akābir*, Socrates 48 (*Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation* [n. 4, above] 110–11).

⁵⁵ In Ps.-Plut. *De liberis educandis* 14 (10C) the kicker hanged himself after the event; Diog. Laert. 2.21; Them. *De Virt.* 46, *Temistio Orientale* trans. Conterno (n. 9, above); Theophylact Simocatta *Ep.* 43.

⁵⁶ Read *سبح* (*Sin*) for *سبحه* (*BL*).

Aristophanes the following day, he told him: ‘Friend, consider and watch out whether it is truly convenient for us that the cause of self-improvement should come from a means other (than shame), for (without shame one) would not be hindered from [180.15] acting foolishly.’⁵⁷

As for the wondrous Plato, by how much toil do we suppose that he was brought to that whole sea of science? In which sciences was he not instructed? Was he not skilled in physics?⁵⁸ Did he not⁵⁹ (gain) all kinds of learning, and how one should speak about natural beings, teach about ethics, and speak about the invisible and about medicine? [180.20] He enriched his generation with (his) erudition like⁶⁰ a land that abounds with fruit. They say that, since he believed that sleep has power over men because of laziness, he made use of his diligence to avoid sleeping at all. He went to dwell next to a workshop of blacksmiths, so that he was kept awake by their continuous knocking, and he behaved during the night as (he did) during the day. When he fell sick, he felt that sleep was useful [180.25] for the sick.⁶¹

There are also other sayings by wise men who taught of the benefits of toil and strenuousness. Bias said: ‘Discipline defeats anything.’ Theophrastus said: ‘There is nothing that men lack as much as instants and moments. For time is divided into three parts: what has gone, (which) does not return; what is still to come, (which) it is not clear whether it will happen to us; and what is now, (over which) we do not [180.30] have complete control, for riches, lawsuits, and sickness steal it from us, [181.1] and they cut it short in front of our eyes.’⁶²

⁵⁷ The reference is to Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, and for the first part of the anecdote compare Ael. *VH* 2.13.

⁵⁸ For a comparison see Plut. ‘Quaest. conv.’ 718C (8.2.1).

⁵⁹ Read Δ (*Sin*) for Δ< (*BL*).

⁶⁰ Read α for Δ.

⁶¹ Contrast Ps.-Plut. ‘De liberis educandis’ 11 (8D) and Diog. Laert. 3.39, which may derive from Pl. *Lg.* 7.808B. As noticed by A. Swift Riginos, *Platonica: The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 3 (Leiden 1976) 158–64, the anecdote about the blacksmiths is peculiar, and is elsewhere reported by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–74) in the Persian treatise *Nasirean Ethics* 2.1 (*The Nasirean Ethics by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī*, trans. G. M. Wickens [Liverpool 1964 = London 2011] 157 and n. 1554). Riginos’ reference to Bryson, *Oeconomicus*, however, is erroneous, for the anecdote is not found there (*Economics, Family, and Society from Rome to Islam: A Critical Edition, English Translation, and Study of Bryson’s ‘Management of the Estate’*, ed. and trans. S. Swain [Cambridge 2013] and 407–10 about Ṭūsī). It seems likely that, through intermediaries, Ṭūsī ultimately derived the anecdote from the ‘De exercitatione’, and his work reveals familiarity also with Themistius’ *De amicitia* (Wickens, *Ethics*, 243–45; for possible Arabic intermediaries see Conterno, *Themistio Orientale*, 38–39 [n. 9 above] and F. Rosenthal, ‘On the knowledge of Plato’s philosophy in the Islamic world’, *Islamic Culture* 14 [1940] 387–422, 402–05). In Arabic literature, the anecdote is found in the *Muḥtār min Kalām al-Ḥukamā’ al-Arba’ah al-Akābir*, Plato 28 (*Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation* [n. 4, above] 128–29).

⁶² A saying about the flowing of time by Theophrastus, which survives in the tenth-century Arabic *Depository of Wisdom Literature* (*Ṣiḥwān al-Ḥikmah*, ch. on Theophrastus, saying no. 18), has been related to the present passage by W. W. Fortenbaugh *et al.*, *Theophrastus of Eresus. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence* (Leiden 1992) no. 459 (2.288–89), with commentary in W. W. Fortenbaugh, *Theophrastus of Eresus. Commentary Volume 6.1. Sources on Ethics* (Leiden 2011) 335–36.

We should beware of sleep as individuals who know that it snatches moments of our life from us, and we should not sleep half our lives. For if we waste the time that has been given to us for the pursuit of good deeds, what time is left for us to do those good deeds if our days are [181.5] wasted?

There was a man⁶³ who was immersed in a flood of desires, and boasted in front of his friends saying: ‘It is twenty years that I have not seen the sun when it rises or when it sets’, for at dawn he was immersed in sleep, and at the sunset (he was immersed) in wine. Although still alive, therefore, he might as well have been dead⁶⁴ on account of his desires. [181.10] Instead, diligent men⁶⁵ have left the memory of (the consequences of) their excellent desires even after their death.⁶⁶

The power of practice is so strong that it overcomes the weakness of old age. Not many years ago, there was a ninety-four-year-old Libyan man. For most of the day, the old man stood in the square brandishing a spear or [181.15] holding a shield — but in our days many live so luxuriously that they are tired even when they are carried around: others guide them, bathe them, anoint them, put them to bed, and give them a hand to get up. They are not different from the sick or from those whose limbs have been hurt. That old man from Libya showed⁶⁷ youthfulness in his vigour, whereas they, [181.20] in their youth, have become sick through their laxity. Toil is beneficial and makes those who are occupied with it men, while laxity confers feebleness on those who are open to it and can diminish the strength of the soul and of the body.⁶⁸

It is possible to show that training was not renowned among men alone but also among women. Who is not aware of the philosophy of Aspasia, who advised many rhetors (ρήτορ) [181.25] and philosophers in Athens?⁶⁹

When Cyrus (the Younger), who had long desired the kingdom, went to fight against his brother (Artaxerxes II), he ordered that twenty virgins from Asia should come to him together with other beautiful women, for he believed that the father of Aspasia would send her together with the others. All of them came in splendid garments and with astonishing adornments, [181.30] but

⁶³ In all likelihood this man has to be identified with Smindyrides of Sybaris, the man with a thousand slaves, for whom see Athen. 7.273BC.

⁶⁴ Read *חס* for *חס*.

⁶⁵ Read *עמ* for *עמ*.

⁶⁶ Contrast Sen. *Ep.* 122.2.

⁶⁷ Read *עמ* for *עמ*.

⁶⁸ Read *עמ* for *עמ*.

⁶⁹ In Plat. *Menex.* 235e–236d, Socrates claims to have learnt the art of rhetoric under the guidance of Aspasia, who instructed others, including Pericles; Plut. *Per.* 24.

because of her great modesty Aspasia came last of all, whilst [182.1] her eyes were lowered to the ground and with tears flowing down her cheeks. When the king saw her, he loved her best on account of the magnificence of her face and the modesty of her soul.⁷⁰ Although the king loved her, however, her mind was not puffed up and she remembered her previous humility. [182.5] She owned much wealth, but, when Cyrus died in war she left all Persian riches and went to Athens.⁷¹

The Athenians envied her, and mounted an accusation (καταγόρευσις *ῥήτωρ*) against her.⁷² She thus prepared a discourse and had it delivered saying: ‘If the law allowed that women should speak in the courtroom, I would have defended myself; but now one of you will lend his voice to me to read (my discourse) [182.10] without adding or omitting anything.’ Once the discourse was read, her enemies fell silent, stood up, and disappeared.

She did something even more astonishing than this. After the plague came and Pericles died, the Athenians, who were envious of her,⁷³ said that Aspasia had not helped him because of (her) philosophy, but that the man had a brilliant mind, and through his own diligence [182.15] he had become a skilled rhetor (ῥήτωρ). But when she heard such things, she wanted to reveal their lie. She took a man who was a sheep dealer and she made him live in her house, and trained him through discipline until she made him a skilled rhetor (ῥήτωρ) and an admirable commander. So beneficial is diligence, that it reveals new (skills).⁷⁴

Is the lifestyle of the philosophers not enough to show that practice, as well as habit, strengthens nature? [182.20] For those same (philosophers), because of their self-control over their mind(s) and the fortitude of their soul(s), endure walking barefoot, whilst being content with a single garment for summer and for winter. They sleep on a mat without a mattress, and they are sustained by simple food: they eat in measure to maintain life. They despise mockery, and it is as if they wear a body of adamant (ἀδάμας) [182.25] and possess a heart of iron: in this way, they are not weakened. For it is habit, discipline, and continence that restrain and strengthen the soul and foster (growth) in resplendent bodies, for bodies are nourished by food and the soul by philosophy. Many pity the philosophers because they see them suffering, but (the philosophers)

⁷⁰ The anecdote is found in Plut. *Art.* 26 (compare Xen. *An.* 1.10.2).

⁷¹ The passage contains a historical inaccuracy: the author identified Pericles’ mistress as Cyrus’ concubine, while in Plutarch, *Per.* 24, the two women named Aspasia are not confused. It is not impossible to conceive that this passage (from ‘When Cyrus’ to ‘went to Athens’) is a later addition because it does not deal with the topic of practice and both the preceding and following text deals instead with Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles.

⁷² Compare Plut. *Per.* 32.

⁷³ Strangely this point has been already made in the previous paragraph.

⁷⁴ According to Plut. *Per.* 24, the anecdote about the sheep dealer Lysicles was narrated by Aeschines of Sphettus, possibly in the lost dialogue entitled *Aspasia* (Diog. Laert. 2.61).

rejoice that their self-denial provides them not only with dignity, but also with pleasure; for, through habit, [182.30] all good that is beneficial to nature becomes also [183.1] agreeable.

Through diligence, many came to an advantageous transformation. Cimon spent his youth so foolishly and dissolutely that the guardians (ἐπίτροπος) did not entrust him with the inheritance that his parents left out of fear that he would consume it dissolutely. When he became a man, [183.5] he was so much changed that he even benefited his city with words and with deeds, and he magnificently defeated the Persians on land and at sea.⁷⁵

As, in general, those who disdain to learn because their minds are brilliant in learning remain in a state of fear through their contempt (for learning), so also he, whose mind is slow, (does not despise learning and) through his vigilance and diligence in learning (becomes) [183.10] courageous and confident.

Once a man asked one of the athletes (ἄθλητής) who had gathered for an agon (ἄγών): ‘What is your name, and where are you from?’ He answered: ‘Wait a moment, and you will hear it from the herald.’ Later, after he defeated his enemies in the fight, the herald proclaimed his victory, his identity, and his origin.⁷⁶

Another athlete (ἄθλητής), when he was ready to enter the fight [183.15], raised his hands to the sky and said: ‘God the Lord, if I have neglected anything that is necessary to gain victory, may I leave defeated; but if I have not omitted any toil, may the crown come to me.’ Oh upright prayer! Oh soul so conscious of its toil!



Many learnt to shoot birds⁷⁷ with a sling and became so skilled that, [183.20] whenever a flock of birds flew by, they could predict how many they could bring down and they would aim with the hand and with the expectation of shooting as many of them as they had predicted.⁷⁸

So also knowledge is not (gained) without discipline. He who aims to become wise should read many books of philosophers, poets (ποιητής), and rhetors (ρήτωρ), and as [183.25] a painter who paints a living creature from distinct pigments, so also one obtains one body of instruction from various readings.⁷⁹



An existence of pleasure, filled with desires, should not be called life, nor should an existence full of exhaustion and work.

⁷⁵ Plut. *Cim.* 4.

⁷⁶ See n. 32, above.

⁷⁷ Read  for .

⁷⁸ Plut. ‘An virtus doceri possit’ 440B.

⁷⁹ It appears that  translates ζῷον, and  translates φάρμακον.

As⁸⁰ different as those who sail in a calm sea are from those who are dragged along in tempests, so are [183.30] the chaste dissimilar from the lascivious: the latter do not lack tribulation, nor do the former lack peace.

[184.1] For nothing good is acquired without toil nor, when it is acquired, can it be retained (without toil). Who is without toil? Speaking first about birth: is it not for ten⁸¹ months that women bear a heavy burden in their womb? Is it not that they suffer fierce pains during their travail? Is it not in exhaustion and in fatigue [184.5] that they raise their children? Do they not control the children's disordered movements lest their limbs grow crooked? Are they not compelled to prattle and speak foolishly? Do they not learn the needs of the children through dumb weeping, and attend to their desires? Do they not mourn if the children pass away? Are they not terrified if the children get sick? Are they not deeply distressed if they eat little, and fearful if they eat too much? Do they not [184.10] set teachers for them when they begin to reason? When they grow up, do they not bear their severity, their drunkenness, their intercourse with prostitutes, and their vain expenditures? The early stage of our lives is so full of difficulty.

As for the professions,⁸² how are they learnt? There are many paths trodden by men to fulfil (their) needs. One lives from [184.15] (the work of) his servants, one from agriculture, another from seamanship,⁸³ another from teaching; one from trade, and another from usury. But are there any of them who (became) accomplished (in their profession) without toil? And if you speak about nature, have you not learned to speak about it through toil and over a long time?

As for war, which is the harshest thing that exists among us, I shall say that there is nothing as beneficial [184.20] to us as to win. Thus the land is guarded and riches increase thanks to looting; and, thanks to the victory obtained in war, nobody is enslaved who is freeborn. Is there anything that demands more toil than war? Why should I narrate the diligence of other peoples? How did you, who are Romans,⁸⁴ subdue the earth? Have you not achieved it and [184.25] were you not occupied with it while exhausted through hunger and thirst, enduring vigils and keeping watch, being struck by arrows, besieging your enemies in gorges or being besieged by them in valleys? Not when you showed humility in the governorship and obedience among the people? [184.30] Not when the victory did not make you proud and the loss did not make you low? Not

⁸⁰ Read 𐤀𐤃 for 𐤀𐤃.

⁸¹ *BL* 'ten'; *Sin* 'nine'.

⁸² 𐤀𐤃𐤁𐤁𐤁 is likely to translate τέχνη.

⁸³ Read 𐤀𐤃𐤁𐤁 for 𐤀𐤃𐤁𐤁.

⁸⁴ This remark seems unusual since Plutarch's own essays are not typically addressed to 'Romans' in general (see for instance P. A. Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* [Oxford 2015] 32–40). It is not impossible to conceive that the original text contained the name of a dedicatee that was omitted in translation and the following text readapted, e.g. 'your own countrymen, NN, the Romans' or similar.

[185.1] when you stood facing others? Not when you raised a supplication to God? Not when you gave immediate execution to the affairs that required promptness, fatigue to the things that required toil, and expenditure when money was necessary? Not when you crowned the distinguished and rebuked [185.5] the base? These and such things have crowned you the winners. For if those who enter a fighting contest (ἀγών) bear bruises and fractures of limbs for crowns of ivy and laurel (δαφνίδιον), how much more have you had to endure sufferings (for your) power over the Greeks and over the barbarians!

Thus, assiduity accomplishes many things that nobody expected could be accomplished, as [185.10] it is related that the powerful king of the Persians built a bridge over the sea and stretched (the sea) on the inner side of the mountain thanks to an immense (amount of) toil.⁸⁵

Who has not failed through negligence? For rocks have been pierced through continuous dripping, animals that are threatening by nature can be tamed through habit, iron becomes flexible in the fire, a stone attached to a wheel [*lacuna*] and breaks the strength of trees.⁸⁶

What soul does not profit [185.15] from discipline, or what body is not made healthier through practice? What land does not flourish, or what tree produces little fruit through farming? What garment, once clean, is not beautiful? Habit has taught a bird to imitate the voice of man, and slothfulness has cast the eloquent into silence.

Young men, place into your heart these (recommendations) and abandon the dissolute pleasures (that) desires (bring), [185.20] and assiduity shall be the path to (your) virtuous exploits. For diligence shall make you, if not superior to everybody, (at least) superior to your present condition.

Do not choose pleasure over benefit, and do not exchange the rest of your life for a short period of time, since lust flourishes for a short time. It oppresses when it happens, it saddens when it has happened, [185.25] and it troubles before it happens; and (so) there is no time at all that is appropriate for it.

Do not eschew virtuous deeds because vexations accompany them. Vexations are harsh for those who are not used to them, but they are light for those who are trained in them. For vexations resemble a dog: as dogs bite those whom they do not know but [185.30] wag their tails for those whom they do, so also are toils: they cause pain to those who are not [186.1] trained (to endure them,) but are pleasant to those who are practised. In addition, pleasures generate vexations and regrets,⁸⁷ but vexations are the cause of pleasures and delights.

⁸⁵ The king is Xerxes: see Hdt. 7.22–24 and 7.34–37.

⁸⁶ The passage presents conspicuous similarities with Ps.–Plut., ‘De liberis educandis’ 2D.

⁸⁷ *Sin* رُجُوع ‘regrets’; *BL* خُصَر ‘losses’.

On the contrary, [186.10] this I shall say. The painter Nicomachus undertook to make a portrait of Antipater, the king of the Macedonians. He completed the painting in forty days and took a large amount of talents. When king Antipater told him: ‘You have taken more money than your picture is worth, for you have painted it in few days!’. he answered: ‘King, it did not take forty days for me [186.15] to paint it, for I have attended to (painting) for more than forty years! I have trained for a long time so that I can paint easily and readily every time I want to paint.’⁸⁸

All difficulties become pleasant through experience, and the intensity of the desires holds their pleasure in check through satiation.⁹⁰ For, if there is no suffering in performing virtuous deeds, then no praise is needed⁹¹ for the assiduous to make their suffering bearable.

⁸⁸ The anecdote is problematic: contrast with Plin. *HN* 35.108–10 (ch. 36), recording a similar anecdote about Nichomachus and Aristratus, the tyrant of Sicyon, and see Gildemeister 1872, 536 n. 1.

⁹⁰ *Sin* ܣܝܢ ‘holds in check’; *BL* ܒܠܠܬܐ ‘is held in check’. The sentence is nonetheless problematic.

⁹² I am grateful to the organizers and the audience of the conference, and to Eva Falaschi, Christopher Jones, John North, Donald Russell, Simon Swain, David Taylor, and the anonymous reviewers.

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List of variant readings

	MS Sin. Syr. 16	MS BL Add. 17209
177.10	ܠܘ	ܠܬܠܘ
177.14	om.	ܝܡ
178.3	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.5	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.11	om.	ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.11	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.13	ܠܬܠܘܢ	om.
178.15	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.18	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.18	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.20	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.28	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
178.30	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
179.2	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
179.12	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
179.17	om.	ܠܬܠܘܢ
179.21	om.	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ
180.8	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
180.18	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
181.18	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ
181.18	om.	ܠܬܠܘܢ
181.21	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
181.26	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
182.6	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
182.18	om.	ܠܬܠܘܢ
182.24	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
182.26	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
182.26	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ ܠܬܠܘܢ
183.1	om.	ܠܬܠܘܢ
183.6	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
183.10	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ
183.13	ܠܬܠܘܢ	ܠܬܠܘܢ

183.15	ڪي ڏي ڪو	ڪو ڏي ڪي
183.21	ڦلڪو	ڦلڪو
183.23	وڏو لڏو	وڏو
184.3	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
184.8	ڪوڪو ڦلڪو	ڪوڪو ڦلڪو
184.16	ڪو ... ڪو	ڪو ڪو
184.17	ڏي ڦلڪو ڪو ڪو	ڏي ڦلڪو ڪو ڪو
184.17	om.	ڪو
184.22	om.	ڪو
184.30	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
185.5	ڪوڪو ڦلڪو	ڪوڪو ڦلڪو
185.5	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو
185.8	ڪو	ڪو
185.8	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
185.10	ڪو	ڪو
185.11	ڪو ڪوڪو	ڪو ڪوڪو
185.11	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو
185.12	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو
185.19	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو
185.24	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو
185.25	ڪو ڪو ڪو	ڪو ڪو ڪو
185.26	ڪو ڪو	ڪو ڪو
185.27	ڪو	ڪو
185.29	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
185.29	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
186.1	om.	ڪوڪو
186.2	om.	ڪو
186.2	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
186.2	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
186.5	ڪو ڪو	ڪو ڪو
186.18	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو ڪوڪو ڪوڪو ڪوڪو ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو
186.20	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو ڪوڪو ڪوڪو
186.21	ڪوڪو	ڪوڪو
186.21	ڪو	ڪو

186.22

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